ol. VIII. Numb. 80

THE OBSERVATOR.

n the Increaſe and miſerable Circumſtances of our Poor. On the great Damp put to Trade by l ng and general Mourning; with ſome Thoughts towards regulating that Matter, without any Diſreſpect to living Princes, or to the Memory of thoſe deceas'd. On Propoſals of imploying the Poor, by Richard Merryweather, *of* Old Brentford, *Eſq;*

From Wednesday, November 2. to Saturday, November 5. 1709.

ountry-m. HERE are ſeveral bulky Packets for you, Maſter, directed to me. I ave ſorted them for your Eaſe, and am of Opinin, that you ſhould begin with thoſe relating to he imploying and providing for the Poor; whoſe Caſe I cannot but pity, conſidering the high Price f Bread, their Want of Firing during this cold Seaſon, and their Want of Imployment, by which hey might get Money to purchaſe both.

Obſ. I approve your Choice of the Subject, *Roger*, tho' I be ſorry for the Occaſion, and particularly for the Decay of Trade, which diſables ſo nany of thoſe to imploy poor Peop'e, that formerly want to do it. The Nation will feel that Burden grow heavier every Day, if ſpeedy Care be not taken to prevent it; therefore I hope our Legiſlature, when they meet, will take it into their Conſideration.

Country-m. I heartily wiſh they may; for our Pariſh, and moſt of thoſe in our Neighbourh od re double tax'd already towards the Maintenance of the Poor, Maſter, and yet it will not do. It grieves me to ſee ſo many People that formerly us'd o maintain themſelves and their Families, by their Work, now come to the Pariſhes for Want of Buſineſs, particularly thoſe belonging to the Silk and Lace Trade, and other Imployments, that are affected by long and general Mournings; of which I hear ſuch frequent and loud Complaints, that I hope our Legiſlature will have their Thoughts upon regulating that Matter for Time to come.

Obſ. The Caſe deſerves Conſideration indeed *Roger*; for abundance of ſubſtantial Tradeſmen have a great Part of their Stock lying dead by 'em, on that Occaſion; which not only pinches their own Families, but diſables them from imploying many hundreds of others, that depended upon them, and are now reduc'd to beg their Bread.

Country-m. I know it too well, Maſter. Pray let me have your Thoughts how that Grievance may be redreſs'd.

Obſ. 'Tis my Opinion, *Roger*, that the Tradeſmen concern'd, ſhould lay the Caſe before the Government, which is affected by it, as well as themſelves; for every Decay of Trade affects the Revenue, and is a Loſs to the Crown, as well as to the Subject. 'Tis certainly a Duty we owe to good Princes, to give a publick Teſtimony of our Sorrow, when they themſelves, or their neareſt Relations, are taken away by Death; but that might be done by ſome other Methods, than thoſe which ſo univerſally affect Trade. Any Thing that ſhould be look'd upon as a Teſtimony of publick Grief, would anſwer the End as well: And I am of Opinion, *Roger*, that not only our publick Mournings, but even thoſe of private Families, ought to be regulated. There's the ſame Reaſon in the Main, for ſuch a Reſtraint, as there has been at any Time for ſumptuary Laws againſt Exceſs in Apparel; for that Expence which Cuſtom has now in ſome Sort made neceſſary to private Families, with Reſpect to Funerals and Mournings, lies many Times ſo heavy upon them, that Widows, Children, and other Relations, do frequently ſuffer by it, and to the Affliction of loſing a Friend, they have that of laying out conſiderable Sums added, which might be better imploy'd for paying their Debts, maintaining their Families, improving their Stocks, or in diſcretionary Doles to the Poor, proportionable to the Rank and Ability of the Deceas'd.

Country-m. There are ſo many Inſtances of it every Day, Maſter, that I wonder it has not been taken into Conſideration ere now: But pray give me your Thoughts as to the Regulation of publick Mournings; for 'tis they which moſt affect Trade.

Obſ. 'Tis my Opinion, *Roger*, that the Time ought to be ſhorten'd, as to the Publick at leaſt. We find, when *Jacob* dy'd, who was a Patriarch, the Prince of his Family, one of the Founders of the *Iſraeliti ſh* Nation, and Father to *Joſeph*, who was *Pharaoh*'s chief Miniſter, or rather his Lieutenant over *Egypt*, the Mourning for him was confin'd to threeſcore and ten Days, tho' his Funeral was very ſolemn, and his Corps attended by the Court of *Egypt*, and all the chief Men of the Country; which is the more remarkable, becauſe that was then the moſt ſplendid and ſumptuous Court that we hear of in the World, and the whole Nation ſympathiz'd with *Joſeph*, becauſe of his high Dignity, and his Merit, in ſaving them by his Wiſdom and Foreſight, during ſeven Years Famine; which was as great an Obligation as ever Prince in the World put upon Subjects. Then as to the Manner of Mourning, we find, that when the *Iſraelites* loſt their excellent King *Joſiah*, they expreſs'd it by mournful Songs, Part of which we have recorded in the *Lamentations*. Inſtead of this, *Roger*, 'tis my Opinion, but with Submiſſion to better Judgments, that a Sermon on ſuch Occaſions in each Pariſh might be taken as a ſufficient Token of publick Grief for the Nation in general, and that the Domeſticks of the Prince, and none elſe, ſhould be oblig'd to wear Mourning for a limited Time. This would ſave a vaſt Expence to the Nobility, Gentry, and others of Note, that are now by Cuſtom oblig'd to lay aſide their Coaches and Apparel, and be at the Charge of Mourning Coaches and Cloths for themſelves and their Servants; and others, in Imitation of the Court and them, are aſham'd to appear there, or at any publick Office, or indeed to come to any Great Man about Buſineſs, except they be in Mourning. What a Damp that puts upon Trade, and how burdenſome it is to Families, is ſo well known, that it needs not be inſiſted on. Vaſt Stocks of colour'd Cloath, Stuffs, Silks, and Lace, lie dead, and many thouſands of poor Families, who depend on thoſe Trades, are ruin'd on ſuch Occaſions.

Country-m. I hope theſe Things will be conſider'd by our Legiſlature, Maſter. All that you and I can do, is, to give Hints, and leave them to the Improvement of thoſe who are capable of redreſſing the Grievance. Pray give me your Opinion of the Propoſals I brought you t'other Day, by *Richard Merryweather*, of *Old Brentford*, Eſq; for imploying the Poor of the Pariſh of *Ealing*, and of his Scheme how they may ſave Money, in purchaſing their neceſſary Proviſions, and how the Exceſſes which too many of them are apt to be guil-

ty of, when they have it, may be prevented; for if it be practicable in one Parish, it may be practicable in all; and considering the growing Numbers and Necessities of our Poor, I think every Proposal of that Nature ought to be consider'd, and a good Scheme form'd out of 'em all.

Off. The Paper is too long, and consists of too many Particulars, for me to give my Opinion of it now. The Gentleman's charitable Disposition to the Poor, and Zeal for the publick Welfare of his Country, is highly to be commended; but tho' we have good Laws already for imploying the able Poor, and providing for the Impotent, they signify little, for Want of due Execution, thro' the Negligence, Incapacity, or Want of a publick Spirit in many of our Justices of Peace, and Parish-Officers. Would every one imitate the Example of that worthy Gentleman, Sir *Matthew Dudley*, who, Mr. *Merryweather* says, has been so highly serviceable to the Poor in his own Country, by taking Care to imploy those who are able to work, and punishing such as are able, and will not, the Condition of our Poor would soon be better'd, and the Nation eas'd of the intolerable Charge it groans under at present by such Multitudes of Beggars; but 'till our Parliament consider the Matter farther, mend our present Laws relating to the Poor, or make new ones for that End, which may be easily put in Execution, tho' an Angel should lay down a Plan, it would be to little Purpose.

Mr. *Merryweather*'s Proposal, that the Parish should be at 10 *s. per* Week Charge for two Persons to teach the Poor to spin Linnen and Woollen, which I suppose he means 'till they themselves be capable to teach others, seems to be modest and reasonable enough, and easy to be put in Practice. His Proposal, that the Poor should allow him one Penny *per* Week out of their Earnings, 'till 5 *s.* for each Wheel be reimburs'd, which will be a Year and eight Weeks, I take to be a very charitable and easy Expedient; that all the Spinners should use one siz'd Clock-Reel, of two Yards about, to knock at every hundred Turns, which determines the Skeins of the Thread, that he reckons at a Farthing a Piece to the Poor for their Labour, seems to be a good and secure Method. That the Parish should secure the Undertaker against the Embezzlement of Tools or Materials; that the Poor should have as good Rates for Spinning, as is given by any others who employ Numbers of Hands; and that any Purchaser may have the Cloth, paying the prime Cost of the Flax, Spinning, and Weaving, seem all to be so reasonable and disinterested, that for my Part I can see no Objection against it. I am of the same Opinion as to his imploying others in combing and spinning of Wooll, and knitting it into Stockings, *&c.* If every one thus employ'd, be capable, as he supposes, after they are taught to earn from 3 *d.* to 6 *d. per* Day, it would be a vast Ease in a little Time to all the Parishes in the Kingdom; and I believe, as he says, would bring down the Parish-Rates from half a Crown, to 1 *s.* 6 *d. per* Pound, and save Money to many poor industrious Families, that are now oblig'd to pay to others, and prevent Multitudes from begging or starving, for Want of Imployment.

But then, *Roger*, there seems to be a Necessity for a Law to put this in Execution, to oblige the Overseers and other Parish-Officers, by Turns, to take Care that the Poor imploy themselves as propos'd, and to punish those who are idle, or embezzle the Materials and Tools. To this End, Houses of Correction will be necessary; but to save that Charge, the Correction may be given them in the Work-house it self; or where there are none, in some publick Place belonging to the Parish. Care must likewise be taken, that the Parish-Rates be equally assess'd, and that no Man should assess himself or his Relations, to prevent Frauds so frequently complain'd of, by which not only the Poor, but the Crown is too often cheated in publick Taxes. There have been Justices of Peace charg'd with Frauds of this Nature, as well as others; and we have heard of Complaints, that some have been too apt to favour one another upon such Accusations at Assizes, against which the Legislature is only capable to provide a Remedy.

Country-m. Would other Gentlemen of Estates, and People of Substance in every Parish, be so publick-spirited as Mr. *Merryweather*, Master, furnish Stocks to set the Poor at Work, where the Parish-Rates are not sufficient to do it, and be so generous as to assist the Overseers, and other Parish-Officers in keeping them at Work, they would become publick Blessings to the Places where they live, ease the Country of an oppressive and overwhelming Grievance, and at last ease their own Estates of heavy Taxes; which I hope they will consider at this pressing Juncture: A small Part of their Superfluities, might save many from starving, and more from begging. But we must adjourn this 'till another Time, Master.

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